

The Anglican Parish of St. Francis

Worship Centre
253 Burrin Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R2V 1E6
(204) 334-6753



Mission Centre
730 McPhillips Street
Winnipeg, MB R2X 2H8
(204) 589-3235

Incumbent: The Rev. Wayne McIntosh
Web: www.stfranciswinnipeg.com

Email: stfrancis@mymts.net
Facebook: The Anglican Parish of St. Francis

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My brothers and sisters,

“How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” Psalm 137:4

Psalm 137! This Psalm is a lament, the ultimate expression of sadness and grief, rooted in the pain of a people living in exile. God’s people are exiled in Babylon, living in a foreign country, many miles from their sacred temple, their home, their businesses, their family; all those things which were so familiar to them...and sacred. They’re thinking: “Has God abandoned us forever? Will we ever return to walk upon the sacred soil of our ancestors? Will we ever reclaim the freedom we once knew and enjoyed prior to the pain inflicted by Babylon?” The Psalmist refuses to answer these questions and perhaps we should not expect him to; after all, this Psalm is a lament and as a lament, it fulfills its purpose. It acknowledges the pain of the people. And more importantly, it invites the reader to find a way forward, even when that way seems obscure. And so; “How SHALL we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” That is the question before them. And that is the question before us now in our own COVID-19 exile.

One of the things that makes the prophetic books of the Bible so inspiring is that they all seek to answer the psalmist’s question. Ezra, Nehemiah, Isaiah, Daniel, Jeremiah, Esther; these are books which found their origins during this dark and uncertain period of Israel’s history. Isaiah speaks of a highway which God’s people would follow and ultimately lead them home. Hope is alive in the prophetic tradition. And yet it is also clear in reading the prophets, that hope alone is not the answer. Hope, coupled with justice would now become their cry. If the people learned anything through the exile, they learned that ritual alone was not enough to please God. Temples and kingdoms come and go. That which we think is “forever”, is like a blade of grass which withers and dies. What we really need is justice and mercy for all; a theme, as we all know too well, picked up by Jesus in the Gospels. And so, a new song breaks forth over all the land. Hope is restored. And the lament of the Psalmist becomes the dance of the courageous.

I would like to reiterate once again, that we are doing all we can to proceed with a safe and timely reopening of our parish church. As you know, Manitoba is experiencing what might be called a “second wave”. Please remain vigilant as we make our way through this period. Many of us are vulnerable with pre-existing conditions. Our collective safety is of paramount concern. And yet, this is not a time to be afraid. It is a time to be responsible. Faith communities have been touched by catastrophic events in the past; pandemics, wars, droughts, earthquakes, fires, and sadly, even mass shootings (remember the Mosque in New Zealand?). We have risen above it all, and we will do so again! We will find a way forward. We will overcome.

You will find enclosed with this letter various updates concerning our parish family, things we have been doing, things we have not been doing, some good news, some not-so-good news. We hope it will be helpful in keeping you up-to-date. You might be interested to know that we are in the process of planning a virtual/online service of Lessons and Carols, which we plan to air sometime during the Advent season. Yes, I know, Advent is just around the corner. Advent (the season of waiting) will take on a whole new meaning this year, won't it? But I digress. Yes, we will definitely keep you posted.

I would like to thank our Pandemic Response Team that has been meeting virtually and regularly, to monitor our situation and responses to the pandemic. Thanks as well to our vestry, which met for the first time in many months (virtually) on Monday. The work you have all been doing is absolutely fabulous. I have every confidence that we will get through this challenge, due largely in part to the hard work of our parish leadership. Please keep us all in your prayers.

Finally, you will notice that we are sadly (but not unexpectedly) in a deficit situation financially. Please review the enclosed information and if you have any questions or comments do not hesitate to contact Bob Wedlake, Fran Anderson, Wendy Henderson or myself. As you are able, please thoughtfully consider what you might do to assist us in this deficit situation. I know, these times are tough, but if we all pull together, we can lessen the burden even just a little bit. We are a resilient people!

Blessings and peace be with you, my friends. This letter comes with my warmest and personal wishes.

Yours sincerely,
Fr. Wayne